

The Potential of Social Media as a Tool for Promoting Learning: a case study of Strathmore University (2014 eLearning Innovations Conference and Expo-kenya)

Track 5: Social Media for Teaching/Training and Learning

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Abstract: Social media may be thought of as a communication tool that allows users to create, modify and distribute content through the use of devices such as mobile phones, tablets, laptops, etc. on platforms such as blogs, file sharing, social sites and wikis among others. This paper is based on a research that was carried out at @iLabAfrica, a Research Centre in Strathmore University. It was driven by the social media myth which has it that if social media is introduced in the classroom, students will be distracted and grasp little of what the lecturer is teaching. The study aimed at investigating mobile device ownership and usage among the students. Specific objectives of the research were to find out what mobile devices students own or have access to, whether they use social media for learning, what kind of materials they share on social media and how much time they spend on social media. This was to help the researcher understand and harness the learning potential of social media if any, to develop and align social media strategies with teaching and learning outcomes.

Desktop research, questionnaires and focus group were used as research instruments to collect data. The university has about 5,000 students from which a sample population was drawn. An in-depth analysis was carried out and a comprehensive report generated. The findings showed that 88% of the students own mobile phones that can connect to the Internet; 5% owned tablets, 38% owned laptops and 7% owned desktops. It was also discovered that 80 % of the students use social media for learning purposes and the kind of materials they share was identified. Furthermore, it was noted that students spend a considerable amount of time per day on the social platforms.

The research concluded that, based on the findings, social media could be turned into a potential tool for promoting learning, complementing other existing methods. This however, will need to be supported by policies that align it to teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Social Media, Mobile Devices, Teaching and Learning, Policies and Strategies